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# Republican Policy Committee

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## White House Decision Due This Week

### Politics Threatens Base Closure Process

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White House political maneuvering is threatening to scuttle Congress' carefully crafted base closing process. The independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC), was established to decide which domestic bases to close or scale back.

But this year, President Clinton and his appointees have intervened in the BRAC process to save California's McClellan Air Force base and its 12,000 jobs (California, with its 54 electoral votes, is a key state for the 1996 Presidential elections). Secretary of Defense William Perry is promoting an alternative that would spare a large number of these jobs by shifting the work performed at McClellan to private industry in California. This alternative could allow the President to accept the Commission's recommendations and still appear to be fighting for California jobs.

If President Clinton does anything but accept the base closure list — he has until July 15 to make a decision — he will be placing politics above a bipartisan process designed to overcome special interest and save the taxpayers billions of dollars.

### Why an Independent Commission?

Since the late 1970s, Congress has been unable to close domestic military bases for political reasons. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the United States began a downsizing and restructuring of its military forces and personnel, making base closings more imperative. Thus Congress passed in 1990 the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act (Public Law 101-510, as amended), establishing an independent, eight-member Commission to ensure that the process of closing and realigning military bases in the United States would be fair, nonpartisan and open to public scrutiny. The BRAC was authorized to meet only in 1991, 1993 and 1995.

To distance politics from the decision of what bases to close and which to keep open, the legislation establishes selection criteria made up of three categories in descending order of importance — military value, return on investment, and impacts (including economic and environmental). The BRAC and Pentagon must follow these guidelines.

## The Current Debate over BRAC's Recommendations

As required by law, the Pentagon first sends its recommendations to the BRAC, which is then free to add or delete bases in writing its own report that is then sent to the President. The 1995 BRAC submitted its report to President Clinton on July 1, recommending 79 closures and 26 realignments of domestic bases, for a savings of \$19.3 billion over 20 years.

The BRAC's actions differed from the recommendations made by the Pentagon, but will save the taxpayer \$323 million more than the Pentagon's proposal. This is the first time that the Commission has recommended savings greater than those contemplated by the Defense Department.

### *Administration Response*

Despite the extra savings to the taxpayers, the Administration initially threatened to send the base closure list back to the Commission because the BRAC list differed significantly from the Pentagon's list. The concern: "the significant number of changes made by the Base Closure Commission relative to the recommendations that we [the Pentagon] made," according to Defense Secretary William Perry [*Los Angeles Times*, 6/27/95].

But the Commission approved 123 (84 percent) of the 146 closures and realignments on the Secretary's original list. This is the same proportion as approved by the 1993 Commission which was agreed to by both President Clinton and Congress. More importantly, the 1991 BRAC agreed with only 83 percent of the Pentagon's original recommendations, but President Bush still approved the list even though the presidential election was just a year away.

Furthermore, while this year's Commission reviewed an additional 36 bases of which it closed or realigned 9 (25 percent), the 1993 BRAC reviewed 72 additional bases and closed or realigned 18 (25 percent). The bottom line: despite Administration posturing and rhetoric, actions taken by the 1995 BRAC have not differed significantly from previous BRAC actions.

The Administration also initially argued that the BRAC's recommendations would jeopardize U.S. national security, since the Commission rejected the Pentagon plan to downsize the five existing Air Force repair depots and opted instead to close two large facilities — one at McClellan Air Force Base in California and the other at Kelly Air Force Base in Texas. The President "will be very interested in what Secretary Perry says about how those decisions affect our national security, our force posture and our readiness," said spokesman Michael McCurry in June [*Los Angeles Times*, 6/23/95].

## ***A Weak Military Rationale***

The White House's arguments are flawed for a variety of reasons. National security is more threatened by the Clinton Administration's cuts of combat units, weapons procurement and research than by cuts in surplus maintenance facilities.

The Administration's use of defense funds for non traditional defense items, such as peacekeeping and defense conversion, divert scarce money from military research, modernization and readiness. If President Clinton rejects the base closure list, he will give up billions of dollars the Pentagon is counting on to ensure an effective future military force.

The Pentagon needs to shrink its costly support facilities as it shrinks its combat forces. Secretary of Defense Perry admitted this in February: "With fewer forces, obviously we need fewer bases, and in the last three base closing rounds, we have reduced our infrastructure about 21 percent. I would point out to you that 21 percent is still less than the roughly 33 percent reduction in forces. Therefore, we are motivated and the services are motivated to reduce the infrastructure further in order to free up dollars that we can apply to readiness and to modernization" [News Conference with Defense Secretary William Perry and Deputy Defense Secretary John Deutch, 2/28/95].

The Commission's recommendation to close two maintenance depots makes sense. The Air Force combat wings will shrink 44 percent, from 36 wings in FY 1990 to 20 or less in FY 1999. The U.S. bomber force will decline by 65 percent over that nine year period, from 372 bombers to 129. With fewer aircraft, less depot maintenance facilities are required.

Further, the Air Force's own calculations ranked both Kelly and McClellan Air Force bases lowest in military value, with Kelly rating a 15 and McClellan rating an 11. The Air Force depots the Commission decided to keep open ranked significantly higher: Hill (UT) at 33; Tinker (OK) at 29, and Robins (GA) at 26. These calculations are based on a review of the following characteristics of military value as set out in law: the current and future mission requirements and impact on operational readiness; land, facilities and airspace; ability to accommodate total wartime forces; and cost and manpower implications.

The Pentagon's recommendation to scale back all five existing depots rather than close any was based on incomplete data, according to the General Accounting Office (GAO):

**"Even though the Air Force recognized that it had excess capacity at its five maintenance depots and was considering closing two, it opted late in the process to realign the workforce rather than close any depots. However, the Air Force based its decision on preliminary data from incomplete internal studies on the potential for consolidating and realigning workload and reducing personnel levels at the depots.... These recommended consolidations appear to expand the workload at some depots that are in the process of downsizing. Thus, the Air Force's recommendation may not be cost-effective, and does not solve the problem of excess depot capacity."** [GAO Report to the Congress and the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, *Military Bases, Analysis of DoD's 1995 Process and Recommendations for Closure and Realignment*, April 1995, p. 7]

And the fact that BRAC added McClellan to this year's list should come as no surprise since in 1993 the Air Force itself put McClellan on its list for closure. The Pentagon, however, deleted it for economic reasons. In addition, the 1993 BRAC added four maintenance depots (except Hill) to their list, but in the end retained them all. In its 1993 report, the BRAC stated, "there clearly remains excess capacity within the DoD depot system," and highlighted depot capacity as one of several issues for further consideration [p. 2-1].

Most recently, the Pentagon has backed away from its own arguments, realizing that they do not hold up to careful scrutiny. Thus, the focus became an alternative to shift maintenance work from McClellan to private industry.

### ***Economic Indicators Considered?***

Some lawmakers have charged that the BRAC did not adequately consider the economic impact criteria when deciding which bases to close or keep open. Also some legislators from California have claimed that their state has suffered the most from this years' BRAC decisions, especially when cumulative economic impact are taken into account.

However, according to Commission Chairman Alan Dixon, Guam will suffer the largest economic impact from this year's BRAC action, losing 7.9 percent of its jobs. Alabama and Alaska are the states next most affected, with a job loss of .4 percent. As for California, it ties with three others for third: Texas, Connecticut, and North Dakota, for a job loss rate of .3 percent. Moreover, the Commission found that closing McClellan would eliminate only 1,200 to 1,400 jobs because much of the work would be moved to other locations. Finally, cumulative economic impact was considered early on in the process — Navy Secretary John Dalton removed from the Navy's closure list four naval bases in California based on cumulative economic impact considerations.

### **What's Next?**

The clock is ticking. President Clinton has until July 15 to either reject the list and send the BRAC back to the drawing board or to accept BRAC's recommendations. While the President has already taken unprecedented steps by intervening in the BRAC process, should he reject the Commission's recommendations, he will grievously damage the 1995 BRAC process and its \$19.3 billion in savings.

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